

GROWING IN FAITH TOGETHER:
A PERSONAL REFLECTION FOR TRINITY SUNDAY
Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on June 4, 2023

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5-14

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

I grew up going to church with my family. Worship, Sunday school, youth group, confirmation class—the whole nine yards. But like a lot of people I drifted away when I went off to college—not because I had a crisis of faith. I just got busy with other things. I did find my way back, though—eventually.

I went to grad school after college, and that's where I met my wife, Daisy. She was in the same program, and her story was a lot like mine. She'd also grown up going to church with her family (her father was a pastor), and she'd drifted away in college, too. But when we got together, we were both at a point where we were ready to give church another try—to experience it not as children who were brought there by our

parents, but as adults who were looking for meaning in our lives.

So there happened to be a big Presbyterian church down the street from my apartment, and for a few months we kind of tested the waters. We'd sneak in during the opening hymn, sit in the back row, and sneak out during the closing hymn. At first I was mainly interested in the sermons. That's what drew me in. The pastor was very academic, and I like learning new things about the readings. I liked looking at them in a critical way and having my mind expanded.

Pretty soon, though, I started getting involved in other things. They had a great adult ed. program. They'd bring in professors from the university to lead classes on all kinds of subjects, and I

signed up for a lot of those. They were really involved in Habitat for Humanity, and I got pretty good at painting. They had a monthly pot-luck dinner, and being a poor grad student living on a stipend, I couldn't pass up a free meal.

The more involved I got, the more I started growing in faith, which is kind of a very churchy way of putting it. What does that actually mean, growing in faith? It sounds like I went up on top of the mountain and had some kind of vision. But for me, all it really meant was that the biblical stories I'd heard all my life began to resonate in a way they never had before. They took on more emotional weight. It was like my heart was being strangely warmed every time I heard them. Sometimes I'd actually get choked up. I remember one Sunday when I was the liturgist, I could barely get through whatever the reading was because I was feeling the words of the text so powerfully.

So it wasn't like there was some big dramatic moment when the clouds suddenly parted and a ray of light shined down. I wish something like that had happened. It would've made a great story. But the truth is, there was nothing mystical about it. I think something finally got through to me—something that had maybe been trying to get through to me for a long time.

The thing about all this that's important for today, when we're focusing on the Trinity, is that all of it happened in a community, and I don't think any of it would've happened outside of a community. I don't think it would've happened if I had sat in my apartment by myself and read the Bible on my own. There's something important about being with people who're on the same journey we're on. There's something vital about worshipping together, and learning together, and serving together. There's even something valuable about

experiencing the challenges that come with being part of a community like the church—a community that welcomes anyone who walks in the door.

I see it as a kind of spiritual discipline—to have a sacred space in our lives that we share with all kinds of people, including people who are different than us, people we don't always get along with, people we might not choose to be our spiritual companions. It teaches us how to accept others for who they are, without judgment. It teaches us how to see others as children of God, same as us. It teaches us how to give and receive grace.

In other words, it teaches us how to be more Christ-like.

Not that it's always a walk in the park. Sometimes we have to deal with conflict, and sometimes we have to be willing to take a hard look at ourselves, the way Paul in the reading today urges the Corinthians to do. "Examine yourselves," he tells them, "to see whether you are living in the faith."

None of that's easy, and to be honest, when I look back over the three decades since Daisy and I walked into that big Presbyterian church together, there have been plenty of times when I wished I could be in a church where I was the only member. Just think how nice that would be. Every decision would be unanimous. Meetings would be over before they even began. Every hymn on Sunday morning would be one of my personal favorites, and the sermon would always speak directly to me.

As nice as it sounds, though, that's not how God made the church. God didn't make many churches of one. God made one church of many, which is a product of who God is. It's a reflection of God's nature. God is not a solitary being who hangs out on lonely mountaintops. God is a community of three persons so tightly

bound together in love that they are who they are only in and through each other.

That's really all you need to know about the Trinity. You don't have to worry about all the ins and outs of the doctrine if you don't want to. Just remember that the Trinity is not some abstract idea that has nothing to do with our lives. It's a reality that has everything to do with our lives. Because we were made in the image of the triune God, and therefore we were made to be in relationship and to grow in faith together.

And the church is where we do that. The church is where we live into who we are, which isn't always easy or convenient, and sometimes we wish it could be some other way. But the fact is, we need each other on this journey. We need each other for wisdom and guidance. We need each other for courage and support. We need each other to develop humility and patience. We need each other to grow in the image of Jesus.

Plus, when you think about it, there was nothing easy or convenient about God taking human form, and sharing our lives, and suffering and dying, and being raised from the dead, and finally sending the Spirit to be with us. But those are the lengths God went to for us. So I think we owe it to God and to ourselves to do our best to be God's people in God's image. Amen.